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SECRET

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Point Paper for DCI

**SUBJECT:** The Soviet Viewpoint on Interdiction of Merchant Shipping in Wartime

Judgment:

Despite the West's need to keep open merchant sea lines of communications and the potential advantages this vulnerability offers the Soviets, there is little evidence to show that the Soviets perceive disrupting of merchant shipping as an essential wartime objective.

Discussion:

In a NATO-Warsaw Pact engagement, the Soviets' foremost initial objective is to destroy NATO's tactical nuclear capability. The main objective of Soviet naval forces is to reduce Western naval nuclear strike potential--its SSBNs (which the Soviets apparently believe have a role in theater nuclear warfare) and aircraft carriers.

[redacted] Soviet staff exercises as revealed in documents [redacted] through 1976 indicate similar objectives. The disruption of shipping, if mentioned, is only incidental.

Soviet naval classified writings available through 1970 and unclassified writings to date show no change in this aspect of Soviet naval strategy. The Soviets have not revealed in any way--writings, speeches [redacted] --evidence of a plan to disrupt western shipping as a means of winning a war with the West. Moreover, Gorshkov's writings seem to indicate that the interdiction of merchant shipping is an outdated concept in the era of nuclear weapons because the duration of the war will be short, and shipping can best be disrupted by destroying ports and the sources of shipping.

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As regards other scenarios outside the NATO-Warsaw Pact arena, our evidence suggests that the Soviets expect that a major conflict in other parts of the world involving vital Western interests would spread quickly to the European theater. The Soviet naval contingency plans of which we are aware, for example, are almost always in the context of a NATO-Warsaw Pact conflict. So long as they hold this view, Soviet naval planners and operators would be deterred from diverting substantial forces away from their primary mission of countering the nuclear-capable forces of Western navies for lesser objectives. Indeed, the few references we see in Soviet classified naval documents regarding local conflicts in distant areas make no mention of attacks on sea lines of communication as an objective.

The above findings address current Soviet intentions. A different issue is what is our best estimate of likely Soviet actions? We believe that in most instances the Soviets would be guided in war by the precepts which have shaped these intentions for so long in peacetime. Nonetheless, because the Soviets do possess the capability to mount a strong campaign against shipping, it is possible that, given the unpredictability of war and the lessons of past conflicts in which peacetime concepts were discarded, the Soviets could alter their strategy. If such were the case, however, they would be forced to abjure strategic precepts which have been the bedrock of their operational planning for more than two decades.